BRIDGING THE FANTASTICAL GAP: DREAD AND THE UNCANNY IN THE SCORE OF *IT FOLLOWS*

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Thesis Prepared for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2020

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Johnson, Kinley. *Bridging the Fantastical Gap: Dread and the Uncanny in the Score of "It Follows."* Master of Arts (Musicology), May 2020, 37 pp., 2 musical examples, 1 appendix, bibliography, 23 titles.

It Follows (2014), written and directed by David Robert Mitchell, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2014. It chronicles the story of Jay, a college student who contracts a curse through sexual intercourse. The curse manifests itself as a human whom only the infected persons can see, always following at a walking pace, and determined to kill if it catches up. This thesis demonstrates the score's crucial role in establishing affect, setting, and character in a film with sparse dialogue and a silent monster. Moreover, the score creates a sense of the uncanny by complicating the binary between music and sound effect and fulfills the need to create dread without resorting to the loud or sudden sounds traditionally heard in horror films. The score's composer, Richard Vreeland, achieves this effect by drawing on both classical film scoring techniques as well as more modern horror scoring styles. It is this interaction between styles that enhances the viewers' experience of dread and horror in the film. This thesis analyzes how Vreeland's score for *It Follows* exploits the poetics of the fantastical gap, of the uncanny, and of musical semiosis. I primarily focus on the "Heels" theme and use of drones in *It Follows*, tracing how these musical features blur the distinction between what is score and what is sound effect. I also examine the use of melodic themes in a primarily non-melodic score. By analyzing these elements, I show how Richard Vreeland uses both classical and modern scoring techniques to answer his own question: "Why is this scary? What could push that emotion even further?"

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It Follows (2014), written and directed by David Robert Mitchell, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2014. It chronicles the story of Jay, a college student who contracts a curse through sexual intercourse. The curse manifests itself as a human whom only the infected persons can see, always following at a walking pace, and determined to kill if it catches up. The curse can end only when Jay dies or passes it on to another host in the same way that she received it. If she is killed by the monster, then the curse will return to the previous person in its chain of victims. This thesis demonstrates the score's crucial role in establishing affect, setting, and character in a film with sparse dialogue and a silent monster. Moreover, the score creates a sense of the uncanny by complicating the binary between music and sound effect and fulfills the need to create dread without resorting to the loud or sudden sounds traditionally heard in horror films. The score's composer, Richard Vreeland, achieves this effect by drawing on both classical film scoring techniques as well as more modern horror scoring styles. It is this interaction between styles that enhances the viewers' experience of dread and horror in the film.

Richard Vreeland, known as Disasterpeace, is best known for his compositions for video games like *Fez* (2012) and *Hyper Light Drifter* (2016). As in his previous work, and as is typical of horror films in general, the score for *It Follows* is entirely electronic, a choice necessitated by the three-week turnaround for the project. Adding to the challenge of scoring *It Follows* in such a short time, Vreeland had limited familiarity with horror films or the music associated with them. By his admission, he, "could count the horror films [he's] seen on one hand." Consequently, the composers who influenced his score for *It Follows* were those whose fame extended into popular

culture and those present on the temp track created by David Robert Mitchell.[1] Vreeland's music from *Fez* was included on the temp track alongside that of John Carpenter, Krzysztof Penderecki, and John Cage. In addition to these avant-garde composers, Vreeland took inspiration from the works of film composers like Ennio Morricone as well.

Historically, horror film scores have had a more challenging affective task than scores for other film genres. To be effective, the score must not only accompany scenes appropriately but also create the right atmosphere of dread. Horror is a confrontational genre that does not allow the audience member to view passively; in other words, a scary movie works only if it scares the viewer. Vreeland expressed his concern about this mission in an interview with the multimedia journalism website Kill Screen about his compositional process, saying, "We wanted the music to play an active role, as if it was [*sic*] a character. The music demands the attention of the audience in the scarier moments. In calmer scenes, I think it helps engage the moviegoer by adding emotional weight."[2]

In examining the way that Vreeland tries to achieve this objective, one finds that his compositional choices are not completely in accordance with current norms and trends in horror film scoring. Horror film scores have standard stylistic features that make the music identifiable as "scary" to the listener even outside its intended context. These aspects include the "sting," a blast of sound at the moment of a scare; the ostinato, which builds tension through repetition; and the drone, also a tension-building technique.[3] All of these are present in the score for *It*

[1] Richard Vreeland, "In Depth: It Follows," accessed September 22, 2019, http://disasterpeace.com/blog/in-depth-it-follows.

[2] Astrid Budgor, "From Fez to It Follows: A Conversation with Disasterpeace," Kill Screen, September 14, 2015, accessed April 10, 2018, https://killscreen.com/articles/fez-it-follows-conversation-disasterpeace/.

[3] K.J. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 100.

Follows, although they are not always used idiomatically for the horror genre. While stingers, ostinatos, and drones form the foundation for Vreeland's score, his pervasive use of leitmotifs throughout the film draws on a technique more closely associated with the symphonic style scoring heard in classic films.[4] In *It Follows,* leitmotifs occur particularly at high tension moments in conjunction with drones to create a score that is both forward- and backward-looking.

This thesis analyzes how Vreeland's score for *It Follows* exploits the poetics of the fantastical gap, of the uncanny, and of musical semiosis. I primarily focus on the "Heels" theme and use of drones in *It Follows,* tracing how these musical features blur the distinction between what is score and what is sound effect. I also examine the use of melodic themes in a primarily non-melodic score. By analyzing these elements, I show how Richard Vreeland uses both classical and modern scoring techniques to answer his own question: "Why is this scary? What could push that emotion even further?"[5]

After situating *It Follows* within a brief history of film scoring in Chapter One, I turn to leitmotif and drones in Chapter Two. There, I discuss the leitmotif "Heels" in terms of Robynn J. Stilwell's "fantastical gap," the liminal space between diegetic and nondiegetic sound.[6] My approach is primarily semiotic. I examine the "Heels" ostinato and how it points to and embodies the presence of the monster. This theme is a leitmotif that works on multiple levels, as both an icon, symbol, and index signifying the curse, its approach, and the damage it can inflict. The use

[4] K. J. Donnelly, "The Hidden Heritage of Film Music: History and Scholarship," in *Film Music: Critical Approaches,* ed. K.J. Donnelly (New York: Continuum, 2001), 1-15.

[5] Budgor, "From Fez to It Follows: A Conversation with Disasterpeace."

[6] Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap Between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema,* ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 184-202.

of leitmotifs is a hallmark of classically scored films, on which Wagner's influence is undeniable and frequently discussed by film scholars.[7] Beyond its role as a leitmotif, I will analyze the ways the theme audibly remains within the threshold between nondiegetic and diegetic sound to deprive the audience of stability in a scene and enhance the dread they experience. Discussions of dread and horror will be phenomenological, as laid out in Julian Hanich's work.[8] Hanich examines the different types of fear evoked by horror films, including dread, terror, and shock. He then uses a variety of films to explain how these scenes are designed to be effective, and how these different types of fear impact the viewing experience

While drone is a standard technique in horror scoring, it plays an especially important role in the creation of dread in *It Follows*. The melodic themes are used in transitional scenes or to establish a character, whereas a drone is employed when there is imminent danger to build up to a climactic moment of fright. K.J. Donnelly's chapter on horror in *The Spectre of Sound,* a suggests that a drone may be conceived as an imitation of a physical fear response, in this case, blood rushing.[9] This intriguing interpretation of drone, although only one among other possibilities, proves particularly illuminating in the case of *It Follows*.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge horror's long history of placing gender, sexuality, and Otherness at the center of many narratives.[10] *It Follows* continues this tradition, with a female protagonist followed by what is essentially an invisible sexually transmitted infection. The film does avoid some of the common tropes: Jay and her friends do not treat sex as a taboo,

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[7] Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, *Wagner and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[8] Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 156-58.

[9] Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound,* 105-106.

[10] Barry Keith Grant, ed., *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015).

and Jay is not punished for her loss of innocence, as it is established that she was not a virgin when she received her curse. Both men and women are susceptible to the curse, and the only explicit reference to gender in relation to the infection comes when Hugh implies Jay will have an easier time passing it to someone else than he did. The entity, when shown in its human form, always takes the form of gendered bodies that tend to align with stereotypical presentations of gender in horror. Although both male and female bodies are subject to this treatment, the entity's female forms are more frequently shown nude, violated, or engaged in taboo sexual behavior. While these themes play an important role in *It Follows*, they are generally explored in the visuals and dialogue rather than within the score. Whether it is due to the short turnaround on the score or his general lack of literacy in horror film at the time of this project, Vreeland's score does not engage with the themes of sexuality and gender that are so present in the narrative. For this reason, themes of sexuality and gender do not play a significant role in further chapters.

In this thesis, score refers to the music featured in the film, not a physical score. While there are a few transcriptions of tracks available on Vreeland's blog, the majority of the physical score is not available. Though the terms soundtrack and score are often used interchangeably when discussing film, score refers specifically to music whereas soundtrack refers to all sound present in the film. Sound effects include all sound in a film with the exception of dialogue and music. Finally, although historically the terms have been interchangeable in film studies, leitmotif and theme are distinct ideas. A theme is any repeating piece of music within the film, but it is not considered a leitmotif unless it carries a deeper level of signification within the narrative.

CHAPTER 2

A HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF MUSIC IN HORROR FILMS

The history of film music begins with silent films which, despite their misleading name, were rarely silent. Depending on the size of a venue, audiences could expect a phonograph, individual musician, or even a small orchestra to provide music to accompany the films shown. Films rarely had specific scores created for them, so accompaniments were unstandardized across different theaters. Instead, two primary approaches to scoring films emerged: improvisation, the creation of a unique score on the spot, and compilation, the use of pre-existing music. Improvisation allowed the musicians to more closely mimic the actions on screen without having to edit pre-existing music to fit the run-time of a scene. However, due to the frequently changing feature presentations of most theaters, ensembles had little time to rehearse, making improvisation more viable for individual organists than for orchestras. Compilation solved this issue by allowing musicians to pull from a repertoire of classical music that they already knew, requiring less rehearsal time and allowing films to be scored more predictably.[11] Moreover, the use of classical music tended to lend a sense of sophistication to the film that appealed to audiences.[12]

Regardless of whether a film was scored through compilation or improvisation, the results tended to be similar. This is because musicians pulled from the same set of "cultural musical codes."[13] It was expected that the theater's ensemble would perform music that was sensitive to the actions and emotions played out in the film, a practice called "playing the picture." Known musical codes determined the appropriateness of a piece for the given scene.

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[11] Buhler and Neumeyer, *Hearing the Movies,* 103.

[12] Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound,* 97.

[13] Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4.

For example, one could expect pastoral topics when shown a rural setting, or a slow piece for strings in a love scene. These associations were formed through their repeated use in classical music, and the inherent connotations allowed for audiences to easily identify the emotions of a scene. This recurrent use of cultural musical codes continued into the era of sound films and solidified the cinematic musical sign system that are still in use today. In horror films, as in other films of the silent film era, scores were primarily formed through compilation. Standard horror scoring techniques had not yet been established, so horror films relied on appropriately "scary" sounding 19th-century art music, especially program music and pieces "influenced by gothic impressionism."[14]

By 1926 the film industry began to experiment with synchronizing sound, and by 1930 silent films were rarely produced. Ironically, due to the limitations of sound mixing at the time, music appeared less frequently in sound film than it had when performed alongside silent film. As movie studios and theaters transitioned to sound film, music's role in films became less clear; instead, effects and dialogue took the foreground to ensure audio clarity. As technology progressed and sound mixing became easier underscoring dialogue became more practical. Scores were recorded directly onto the film reel or were recorded on a phonograph record that was synchronized to the film, meaning that scores would be uniform across all showings. The now-permanent nature of film scores allowed for the reuse and development of themes throughout a film, creating a tendency toward leitmotivic scoring. The use of topics and stereotyped music endured though, further codifying the symphonic musical language of the classical film era.

In the early years of sound film, Universal Studios took the lead in horror film

[14] Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 96.

production. Iconic films such as *Dracula* (1931) and *Frankenstein* (1931) included very little music. In the few scenes containing nondiegetic music, Universal continued to feature pre-existing music rather than commissioning new scores. As in the silent-film era, classical and art music lent a sense of sophistication to otherwise low-budget productions. While the limited soundtracks resulted from a lack of funds, the prolonged silences enhanced the suspense in horror films and ultimately furthered their popularity. Despite the tendency toward compilation scoring, the standard horror film techniques—stingers, ostinatos, drones, and sequential rises in pitch—appeared in scores as early as 1933 with the release of *King Kong*.

As Universal shifted its focus to more farcical horror-comedies, its output rapidly dwindled in quality. This decline led British film studio Hammer to take the lead in producing popular horror films in Europe. Hammer's output was musically dominated by the work of James Bernard. His style was straightforward, utilizing the elements of horror film music in an extremely accessible way. K.J. Donnelly describes it as follows:

> Bernard's horror film music was surely the most understandable of film music, being as transparent in its musical processes as it was in its function within the film. The limited roster of technique, and the predictability of the musical devices led to a comprehensive and instantaneous effect on audiences, as well as manifesting one of the most coherent film music philosophies.[15]

Bernard's scores were on the cutting edge of film music, further solidifying the standard horror techniques established in the 1930s while also drawing from the avant-garde concert hall, as in *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961), the first film to utilize Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique. The technological advances of the 1950s and 60s and the production of electroacoustic music were a milestone for film scores, especially science-fiction, which made heavy use of the associations

[15] Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound*, 100.

between alien planets and foreign, inhuman sounds. Symphonic scoring nevertheless remained the most common practice.

While there is no one defining moment in the shift from the "classical" age of film to the modern, the Vietnam War marked a turning point. Many filmmakers sought to create more "realistic" movies, influenced by the news coverage of the war. With this shift came greater focus on popular music in film scores. Popular music had been employed in films throughout the 1960s, but typically only in short scenes as an afterthought to "modernize" the film.[16] It was films like Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972) that used popular music as their primary nondiegetic scores.[17] This modern scoring style relied less on the tropes of classical symphonic scoring, and at times directly subverted them by creating scores that were anempathetic to the characters in the film. Rather than "playing the picture" as audiences had demanded in the 1920s, the score in films like *Last House on the Left* intentionally alienates the viewer from empathizing with the characters, forcing the audience's awareness of their voyeurism.

Despite its decline in the 1960s, modern cinema did not completely lose the influence of classical film, and in 1977 *Star Wars* renewed Hollywood's interest in symphonic scoring. For a film set "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away," it is natural that John Williams looked to the past for inspiration. In particular, a Wagnerian influence is seen in the development of leitmotifs in the film, as well as a similarity to Korngold's score for *King's Row* (1942).[18] Williams cultivated a style unlike that in *Last House on the Left*, eschewing gritty realism in favor of a

[16] Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound*, 101.

[17] Joe Tompkins, "Pop Goes the Horror Score: Left Alone in *The Last House on the Left*," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 98-114.

[18] Lerner, "Nostalgia, Masculinist Discourse, and Authoritarianism in Johns Williams' Scores for *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*," in *Off the Planet: Music Sound and Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 98.

symphonic sound reminiscent of a more innocent time.

Although symphonic scoring experienced a renaissance in other genres, horror filmmakers looked to minimalism and were specifically inspired by the works of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Horror movies of this era heavily featured ambient sound, or sound created to *seem* ambient, to evoke an appropriate atmosphere.[19] Later, especially in Italian horror like the works of Dario Argento, studios hired pop and rock groups to create the scores for films. Argento worked with the progressive rock band Goblin in several movies between 1975 and 2001, combining aspects of classical music, metal, and ambient sound.[20] Throughout the 1980s and 90s, modern scoring styles developed. Films often feature scores that are primarily ambient soundscapes or are reliant on shock effects but may include a lyrical theme as in Charles Bernstein's score for *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984).[21] More thematic scores tend to be scored orchestrally, while electronic scores tend to be more atmospheric.

Horror in more recent years has typically continued its use of standard horror scoring techniques in conjunction with ambient or electronic sound. Furthermore, the popularity of found footage style films has formed an entire genre in which nondiegetic music does not and cannot exist. Orchestral scores are still popular in horror; however, the genre tends to lack the repeating and developing themes that are common in other film genres. In fact, in films produced after 2000, there tend to be fewer distinct themes overall across all genres, instead focusing on

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[19] Paul Theberge, "'These Are My Nightmares' Music and Sound in the Films of David Cronenberg," in *Off the Planet: Music, Sound, and Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 144.

[20] Rebecca Dowd Geoffroy-Schwinden, "Horrific Opera, Aesthetic Violence: Genere in Dario Argento's Opera (1987)," *Kinetophone* 1 (September 2014): 15-34, accessed October 22, 2019, http://www.kinetophone.net/uploads/1/8/3/3/18338489/ 4horrific_opera_-_rebecca_schwinden_-_kinetophone_1_2014.pdf.

[21] J. Blake Fichera, *Scored to Death: Conversations with Some of Horror's Greatest Composers*, (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2016), 42.

nondiegetic music that creates an appropriate atmosphere or mood.[22] As can be heard in recent films such as *Insidious* (2010), many composers have shifted their focus to making interesting, hard to identify sound rather than distinct musical themes. In *Insidious* this is achieved by using a rusty piano as a percussion instrument, scraping and striking the strings.[23] The unsettling effects that can be achieved by unrecognizable musical sounds are often prioritized above character themes in current horror films; however, standard techniques like stings and ostinatos remain constant.

It Follows uses music in a way uncommon for modern horror cinema. Without a doubt, the score's foundation is built upon standard horror techniques established in the 1930s and solidified in the 1960s. Ostinatos, stingers, and a focus on rising pitch are omnipresent in this film and give it its distinct horror sound. This is not notable in itself, as these techniques are still used in the majority of horror films produced today. However, the leitmotivic role of tracks like "Heels," "Detroit," and "Jay" hearkens back to the classical style of scoring, an oddity for the modern horror film. This unusual feature in *It Follows* is explored in the next chapter, with a detailed analysis of the "Heels" theme and its role in embodying the invisible antagonist.

[22] Buhler and Neumeyer, *Hearing the Movies,* 465.

[23] Fichera, *Scored to Death,* 58.

CHAPTER 3

NON-MELODIC SCORING: "HEELS" AND DRONE

"Heels" and Leitmotif

The first sound the audience hears in *It Follows* is "Heels," one of the primary musical themes. It accompanies a girl, Annie, frantically running from an unseen danger before driving away in her father's car. When she arrives at a beach, the music is no longer present. Lit by the car's headlights, Annie calls her father to apologize for her past behavior and says that she loves him. Abruptly, the scene cuts to the next morning with a close shot of her mangled corpse.

From the first second of the film, the "Heels" theme is associated with death and danger. When the nature of the monster is revealed, the meaning of the theme further solidifies. "Heels" is an ostinato that increases in intensity, moving from a low, almost muffled bass to a shrieking, alarm-like stinger. The steady walking tempo of the ostinato mimics the embodiment of the curse, henceforth described as the entity, which can follow the infected person only at a walking pace. The low bass becomes the sound of footsteps following the protagonist, Jay, eventually rising in pitch and becoming a part of the musical soundscape. This raising of the pitch is a common feature of many horror film scores, alongside ostinato, stingers, and drone; sequential rises in pitch indicate danger and build suspense.[24] This technique is effective because listeners tend to perceive a higher-pitched noise as closer in proximity to them. Even before stereo sound allowed for proximity to be conveyed fully, a change in volume and pitch could easily provide the same effect for the audience.[25] In horror films, convincing the audience that something is

[24] K.J. Donnelly, "Hearing Deep Seated Fears: John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980)," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 162.

[25] Donnelly, "Hearing Deep Seated Fears," 162.

moving toward them is one of the main approaches to creating cinematic shock.[26] Although "Heels" appears in full only at the beginning of the film, the ostinato motive is featured in two other tracks, "Old Maid" and "Father." Each time the theme appears, the curse's threat is immediately felt. For clarity, the theme will be referred to as "Heels" in this thesis.

Jay's first close encounter with her curse occurs while she is in class. Through a window, she sees an elderly woman in a nightgown approaching. Recognizing that this person is out of place, Jay flees her classroom and the "Heels" theme begins. Before the entity is visible in the frame, Jay's footsteps are audible as she walks down the hall. The theme increases in volume, covering the diegetic sound, and as Jay turns to see that the old woman has followed her, a high-pitched screeching begins. At no point can the audience hear the old woman's footsteps, a clue that this encounter is not merely a misunderstanding fueled by Jay's paranoia. The danger is confirmed moments later when Jay calls out to the woman and receives a confused response from two other students in the hallway who clearly cannot see the old woman. Jay backs away from the approaching entity and her footsteps become audible again. The monster's steps remain silent as Jay turns and runs out of the building.

The way that Vreeland and Mitchell situate the music in the film is significant in its effect on the audience. "Heels" is a very direct imitation of the curse's movement, an unchanging walking pace. This type of imitation, called mickey-mousing, was a hallmark of classical scoring. Even if the sound is not synchronized with the monster's movement, it is logical to think of the ostinato as the sound of footsteps. At no point does the theme sound completely like a sound effect; the synthesizer cannot be mistaken for the sound of actual footsteps, but the characters do respond to this theme as if it were diegetic. In turn, the theme seems to respond to

[26] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, 133-38.

the characters' emotional states, changing slightly throughout the course of the film to reflect this. In this way, "Heels" is used as a leitmotif.

The use of leitmotifs in horror is a well-documented phenomenon, so the role that "Heels" plays is not a new one. It is less common, however, for electronic scores like Vreeland's to use leitmotifs. Instead, they usually rely on "unnatural" sound to create the mood for a particular scene. Furthermore, it is uncommon for leitmotifs in film to develop the way that "Heels" does. While Wagner's original conception of leitmotif included developing of the themes as the narrative progressed, it is common in film studies for leitmotif to refer simply to a repeated theme. Wagnerian leitmotifs also conveyed multiple, sometimes abstract, meanings. In film, even developing themes tend to be more closely associated with direct signification.[27] Vreeland's score is more operatic than filmic in this regard. While "Heels" does blatantly signify the curse, it is still notable in its ability to symbolize multiple concepts. Equally notable is the way it develops, culminating in its final sounding at the end of the film.

The last time the theme appears is during Jay's final confrontation with the curse. In an attempt to kill the entity, Jay and her friends go to an indoor pool with an array of household appliances. The plan, which David Robert Mitchell identifies as "the stupidest plan ever," is to lure the monster into the pool with Jay and try to electrocute it.[28] Instead, the entity, now disguised as Jay and Kelly's deceased father, enters the room and begins hurling appliances at Jay. As the plan unravels, her friend Paul brandishes a gun and, after several minutes of struggling, manages to get the monster into the pool and delivers what appears to be the fatal

[27] Buhler and Neumeyer, *Hearing the Movies*, 123.

[28] Kyle Buchanan, "*It Follows* Spoiler Bomb: The Director Explains All Those Twists and Shocks," Vulture, March 27, 2015, accessed October 22, 2019, https://www.vulture.com/2015/03/it-follows-director-the-spoiler-interview.html.

blow. The music that accompanies this scene is a track called "Father." Throughout this theme, the "Heels" motive is used, this time at a faster tempo and along with musical features from other parts of the soundtrack. However, the sound of Jay's struggle and her friends' frantic dialogue takes the foreground in this scene, making the theme hard to distinguish. The high-pitched screech can be heard when the monster first falls into the water as Jay tries to exit the pool. The sound of her splashing mostly covers the theme. Because the music is obscured, its effect is also dulled somewhat. In this case, listening to "Father" on the soundtrack album reveals more about the scene. In Jay's previous encounter, the ostinato is at its usual walking pace; however, this time the tempo has increased to reflect the fraught situation. References to other tracks are combined as the movie reaches its climax: the final confrontation with the entity and the last scene to directly present danger.

In his writings on semiotics, Peirce describes three types of signifiers: symbols, icons, and indexes. Generally, symbols are linked to their signified by convention, icons resemble or share a quality of the signified, and indexes are causally connected to the signified.[29] "Heels" functions on multiple semiotic levels. First, the theme is symbolic of the entity. Because the theme is heard consistently when the entity approaches Jay, it can be linked directly to the entity. Next, by developing and changing in tempo, as in "Father," the theme represents the abstract concept of imminent danger as well. The theme can be used to identify how threatening a situation is (i.e., the theme is louder and higher, so this situation is more dangerous), and only appears when the entity is present, so semiotically it can also be considered an index. Finally, "Heels" can be considered an icon of the entity. The entity does not have a consistent physical

[29] Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 14-40.

form, which complicates the theme's ability to resemble the curse. However, the entity has one consistent attribute: its movement. The walking pace and act of following is the one physical feature that the entity possesses, and this is reflected by the ostinato in "Heels."

Beyond the semiotic functions that it fulfills as a nondiegetic theme, "Heels" also has a diegetic role. The first time the audience hears the theme, the entity remains invisible. As Annie drives away to the beach, the theme disappears. When Jay meets the entity at school, the theme becomes more intense as it approaches, but fades as Jay runs away, her footsteps becoming audible again. Finally, at the end of the film, the theme is largely overtaken by the sounds of Jay's struggle in the scene. Despite its faster, more frantic sound, the theme becomes secondary to the sound effects. These appearances imply that "Heels" exists in the diegesis of the film. Rather than being played over the events of a scene, the theme can be drowned out. Its ability to convey proximity, and the fact that it fades when characters evade it, implies that "Heels" occupies physical space in the scene. By this measure, we can conceive of the theme as *being* the entity. A similar type of embodiment is described by K.J. Donnelly in his description of *Night of the Demon*, wherein the demon is prefigured by the music.[30] This role, in combination with the semiotic roles described, blurs the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound in the film and places "Heels" firmly within Robynn J. Stilwell's fantastical gap.

Stilwell explains this concept in her chapter "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," which describes the liminal space between diegetic and nondiegetic sound in a film.[31] The music in *King Kong* (1933) plays with this ambiguity, as Stilwell outlines. As the fog around Skull Island rolls in, music enters. The drums can be confirmed as diegetic when the

[30] Donnelly, *Spectre of Sound,* 106.

[31] Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap," 184-204.

passengers on the boat comment on them, but the music that accompanies the water is never mentioned. Both enter with the fog, appearing to be entirely nondiegetic, but the drums pass through this liminal space when they are acknowledged by the passengers.[32]

"Heels" exploits the fantastical gap between diegetic and nondiegetic sound to great effect. While this theme is clearly a part of the score, the audience can perceive "Heels" as a type of sound effect as well. The characters', primarily Jay's, reaction to the theme indicates some amount of diegetic sound. However, as stated, the audience will most likely not recognize the score as diegetic because it is electronic. The disconnect between the audience's perception and the characters' reactions creates a sense of unsettling ambiguity that enhances the horror in the film. Put simply, the theme is both score and sound effect, keeping the audience in the "gap."

The most notable and effective use of the fantastical gap is heard in the pool scene. When the entity enters the room, the audience is unable to see it. Instead, we view the scene from the perspective of Jay's friends. It is not until the entity begins throwing things at Jay that the others are able to locate the it. At this point "Heels" is heard for the first time. "Heels" did not accompany the entity's approach, but appeared when the non-infected characters became aware of its physical presence. Then, the struggle against the entity begins, and the theme is mostly obscured by diegetic sound effects.

The audience's understanding of diegetic space in this scene collapses as the score remains firmly in the fantastical gap. Up until this point the theme has only been heard when Jay encounters the entity: scenes that we see from Jay's perspective. In this scene, however, we are given the perspective of the other characters, and only are able to hear "Heels" when we perceive the entity. This implies that "Heels" occupies diegetic space in this scene, but is only heard by

[32] Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap," 189.

those who believe in and can, in some way, "see" the entity. Of course, the audience can just as easily perceive "Heels" as a stinger accompanying the attack by the entity, existing as nondiegetic sound secondary to the dialogue and sound effects. The electronic sound still seems unlikely to exist within the diegesis of the scene, but the physical presence the sound embodies is undeniable.

The exploitation of the fantastical gap is common across many genres of film, but most diegetic crossings are very brief and do not require significant attention. *It Follow*s, and more specifically the "Heels" theme is significant because it does not simply cross through the gap, but remains within it for significant periods of time. Vreeland's score keeps the viewer in this gap far longer than most films, increasing the dread they experience by not allowing them to ground themselves in strictly diegetic or nondiegetic sound.

Drone and the Creation of Dread

Drone is omnipresent in *It Follows*, as it is through the majority of horror films in recent years.

Vreeland cited John Carpenter as one of his inspirations for the creation of the *It Follows* score. Carpenter, who frequently provided incidental music for his own films, tended to rely on synthesizers for most of his nondiegetic sound. K.J. Donnelly has identified the use of synthesized sound, especially in the form of drones and stingers, throughout Carpenter's incidental music.[33] By its nature, synthesized sound tends to be perceived as inhuman or inorganic, making it a popular choice for use in horror. In Carpenter's soundtrack for *The Fog* (1980), droning nondiegetic sound is leveled against the unassuming muzak of the local radio

[33] Donnelly, "Hearing Deep Seated Fears."

station. The drone symbolizes the fog, while the radio station is utterly anempathetic to the characters and events in the film, refusing to reflect or comment on the situation. This juxtaposition eschews the expected norms of melodic and non-melodic scoring by assigning the representational role to the drone rather than the muzak.

In *It Follows,* drone functions in a predictable way. When the entity is approaching, the drone tends to be placed lower in the mix and at a lower pitch. As the danger moves closer, the drone raises in both volume and pitch. As mentioned in the previous section, pitch and volume indicate proximity to the listener. The more noticeable the drone is to the audience, the closer the monster tends to be to a character and to seem to be to the audience. One of the best examples of this occurs during a scene in which Jay and Kelly lounge on the beach next to the lake. We see their friend Yara approach from the direction of the lake house, barely perceptible in the distance. As she moves closer, the camera pans to reveal the real Yara floating in the water. Still unnoticed, the false Yara continues to approach as the nearly inaudible drone slowly becomes louder.

In *It Follows,* drone plays a significant role in the creation of dread. Film scholar Julian Hanich differentiates dread from horror by two criteria: temporal structure and intention.[34] Dread is a feeling of anticipation. For a film to successfully instill dread in a viewer, the viewer must be immersed and somewhat uncertain of when something will happen. The audience knows that there is a threat, but is unsure exactly when or how it will appear. Horror is found in confrontation when the anticipation is broken and the actual scare occurs. For example, we feel dread in the face of a closed door and horror when confronted with what is behind it. The beach scene is a good example of how this type of dread functions. The audience sees Yara and, upon

[34] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion,* 156-57.

realizing that the real Yara is in the water, hears the drone enter the soundscape. At this point, our perspective changes to that of Jay's friends. These characters cannot see the entity because they are not infected, so the viewer is no longer able to track the entity's approach. As the drone increases in volume, we can be sure that the danger is still approaching, but we are unable to ascertain when it will arrive. This uncertainty builds tension as the drone continues to get louder. When the invisible entity finally grabs Jay by the hair, the dread has ceased and cinematic horror begins, punctuated by a musical sting.

Film scholars have conceived drone's effects on the audience in multiple ways. K.J. Donnelly briefly mentions the idea of drone as reflective of human fear response.[35] When humans believe themselves to be in danger, a fight or flight response is triggered. This rush of adrenaline increases the heart rate and blood pressure. This audible blood rushing may be the reason that drone is so effective in horror films. Albeit subconsciously, viewers may associate this sound with the sound of their own blood rushing, which may in turn trigger that response.[36] By simulating physical fear response, drone can sometimes incite a fear response even before the typical "scary" sting that comes with horror.

Unlike "Heels," which is a type of auditory icon, the drone does not resemble the entity in any way. Instead, the entity's presence can be inferred by the presence of the drone. In semiotic terms, this is an index. While drone may also directly signify the curse in *It Follows*, it is not a leitmotif in the same way that "Heels" is. Simply put, the drone is not a theme, it is just a standard horror technique used throughout the film. The drone does not fit as clearly into the fantastical gap as "Heels" does in the film, but it plays a similar role. Often when a drone

[35] Donnelly, "Hearing Deep Seated Fears," 160.

[36] As Donnelly notes in Spectre of Sound, music can create a physical response in humans, measurable by heart rate, EEG readings of brainwaves, and respiration.

appears, it is so quiet that the audience can barely perceive it. Once it becomes fully audible, it still does not have a clear origin. The sound is nondiegetic, but could easily be mistaken for ambient sound in the scene. Then, once it rises further in pitch and volume, it becomes fully situated as nondiegetic sound. This type of auditory ambiguity is at play in all aspects of the sound design in *It Follows,* as is explored in the discussion of melodic themes and the uncanny in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The non-melodic themes and use of drone in *It Follows* represent Vreeland's unique approach to scoring horror. The leitmotivic "Heels" theme exemplifies the symphonic scoring of classical Hollywood. This type of thematic development and abstract signification are not frequently found in horror and have been mostly absent in films produced after 2000.[37] Conversely, the electronic score and use of standard horror techniques including drone are found frequently in horror films and are the basis for most horror films produced today. The combination of both old and more modern scoring styles, in conjunction with the extended periods in which Vreeland keeps the audience in the fantastical gap, creates an ambiguous soundtrack that increases the dread experienced by the viewers and carries narrative weight even in scenes with limited dialogue. This soundtrack stands in for the visual horror and represents the invisible threat.

[37] Buhler and Neumeyer, *Hearing the Movies,* 465.

CHAPTER 4

MELODIC THEMES

In *It Follows*, melodic themes are rare. The film's soundtrack consists for the most part of digital drones and blasts of sound, none of which are tonal. While about one-third of the score has some discernable melody, only two melodic themes are primary to the narrative: "Detroit" and "Jay." Both of these themes are heard in calmer moments when the embodiment of the curse is not present. Each appears twice in *It Follows* and is used to establish the viewer's perception of characters and settings. "Detroit" successfully creates an uncanny setting through its juxtaposition of a repetitive arpeggio against a foreboding bass, while "Jay" uses a simple melody to quickly endear the audience to the protagonist. Other melodic themes, including the title theme, "Linger," "Pool," and "Lakeward," will not be considered in this discussion because they are not employed as leitmotifs. These themes only appear once each in the film and may share material, as is the case in "Linger" and the title theme. This does not mean that these themes do not have narrative significance; rather, that they are not repeated makes them resistant to certain kinds of analysis.

"Detroit" and the Uncanny

The uncanny can be described simply as the commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar: something strange or unexpected appearing in a familiar place, or conversely, something familiar at an unexpected time or place.[38] Since the earliest sound films, directors have enhanced the efficacy of their horror movies by using the soundtrack to conjure the uncanny. Neil Lerner provides a thorough examination of the uncanny soundtrack in Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll*

[38] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-3.

and Mr. Hyde (1931), one of the first sound horror films to make extensive use of nondiegetic music.[39] In the film, a strange array of noises, for which the phrase "Mamoulian's sound stew" was later coined, accompanies Dr. Jekyll's first transformation into Hyde. This wash of sound included the strike of a gong reversed and a recording of Mamoulian's heartbeat, the first such recording used in film. The familiar sound of a heartbeat mingled with unidentifiable manipulated sounds added to the horror. While the uncanny during Jekyll's change is invoked sonically only during his first transformation, it tells the audience exactly how to feel during subsequent scenes.

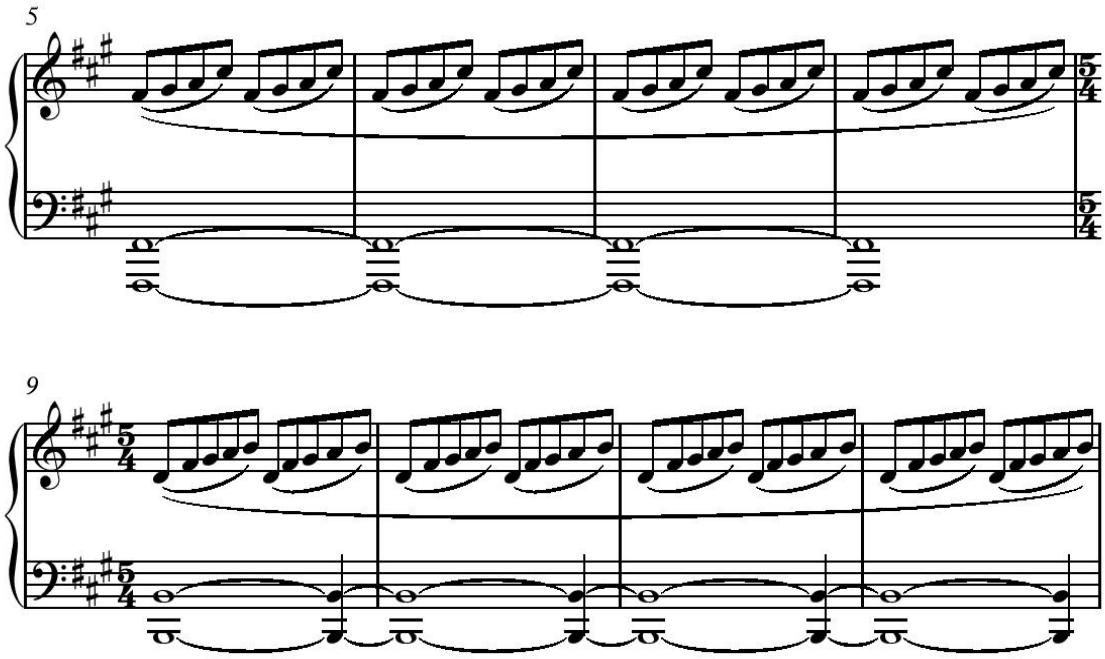
"Detroit" plays a similar role in *It Follows* with one notable difference: there are no familiar sounds present, only familiar locations. "Detroit" evokes the uncanny on multiple levels, first within the track itself, then in the interplay between the theme and the visuals, and finally between this theme and the rest of the soundtrack.

"Detroit" includes both melodic arpeggios and an ominous low bass, scored with the slightly retro synth present in all of the melodic themes. "Detroit" is built using the f sharp minor scale, although there is no leading tone and the harmonies present are not triadic. The theme begins with a four-note arpeggio, first underscored quietly by the bass 8 seconds into the track. The second bass note signals a shift as the time signature changes to 5/4. The change is not jarring, but the balance of 4/4 is replaced by the slightly askew feeling of an odd meter. This shift is uncanny on its own, listeners' sense of equilibrium challenged. As the bass notes become shorter and louder, the harmonic progression doubles in speed. The bass descends in a scale (4-3-

[39] Neil Lerner, "The Strange Case of Rouben Mamoulian's Sound Stew: The Uncanny Soundtrack in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931)," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner, (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 55-79.

2) before ending on a 5-1 motion to F sharp.[40] The bass feels more threatening as it begins to overtake the arpeggios in volume, before it finally fades as the melody slows and ends, leaving the final arpeggio unfinished on a C sharp. Even without the context provided by the visual track, "Detroit" invites uneasiness. The tone of the bass line alone is foreboding and aligned with the uneven meter it diminishes any comfort that the melody may provide.

MusicaL Example 1:"Detroit" m. 5-12, arr. Kris Lennox



In addition to the purely aural level, there is the interaction between the track and the visuals. In the scenes where "Detroit" sounds, the settings are places that should feel familiar and safe to Jay. However, the music reframes the locations through the filter of Jay's anxiety and renders them foreign. "Detroit" is first heard around 32 minutes into the film, as a precursor to Jay's encounter with the entity in her home.[41] The exterior of the house is shown as "Detroit"

[40] Richard Vreeland, *Detroit*, arr. Kris Lennox, 2016.

[41] Appendix: Table 1

fades in: the yellow lights of the porch, an open gate, the still water of the above-ground pool. As the track ends, we move inside to see Jay with her sister, Kelly, and friends, Paul and Yara, settling in for the night. This scene would feel domestic, comforting even, if not for the music that accompanies it. On the surface, "Detroit" is characterized by its bubbling arpeggios, a feature that Vreeland attributes to the influence of Italian progressive rock band Goblin.[42] While somewhat ominous, the arpeggios are not the source of the discomfort. Rather, the low bass is what has the most dramatic effect. As the audience views this otherwise calm scene, the bass alerts us to the fact that something is approaching. The water of the pool now seems unnaturally still, the open gate becomes a threat. Soon after this exposition, the entity breaks the window and chases Jay upstairs, confirming the perceived danger.

The second time we hear "Detroit," it is as Jay, Greg, and the rest of her friends drive to find Hugh, the man who passed the curse to Jay. Lingering shots of warehouses covered in graffiti and dilapidated suburban areas filmed through car windows are intercut with shots of Jay looking anxious. This time, "Detroit" lives up to its title more directly, coloring our perception of the city passing by. Jay and her friends grew up in Detroit, so these streets should feel relatively familiar and safe, but the theme reminds us that things are not right. The cuts back to Jay let us know that it is her anxiety framing this scene. She is afraid of what awaits her when she finds Hugh, and she is afraid of what is following her as they drive. As she travels from the suburbs to the city, her once-safe surroundings have become foreign and threatening.

On the visual track, Detroit is never portrayed as a scary or dangerous place. The suburbs in which Jay and her friends reside are mundane at worst. Most viewers know, however, that

[42] Richard Vreeland, "In Depth: It Follows." Goblin is known for their work with prominent horror director Dario Argento on films such as *Profondo rosso* (1975) and *Suspiria* (1977).

Detroit is a large, densely populated city built on the automotive industry. Since the silent film era, cities have been scored stereotypically. That is to say, cinematic musical codes dictate that urban settings require an urban theme while rural settings demand pastoral topics.[43] Despite the fact that horror frequently employs narratives in which the danger of the city seeps into the suburbs, or the lawlessness of the country is revealed to characters from the city, neither the urban nor the suburban setting is expressed audibly in "Detroit," meaning that the theme has less to do with the realities of the city than with the perception that the characters have of it.

Often, a sense of uncanniness is heightened by an inability to orient oneself within the world presented. In this case, the disorientation is both audible and visual. The props in the film are designed to create a world that does not exist in any particular time. Jay's house is furnished with older furniture, a style that appears more appropriate for the 1970s than for 2014. The television in Jay's house plays only black and white movies or classic cartoons. There are corded phones in the house, and Yara is the only character with a cellphone, which is used only as an e-reader. There are both new and older models of cars in the world, but all of them are in pristine condition. Furthermore, the costumes do not point to any particular era or season. Jay swims at the beginning of the film and does not seem cold, but both she and her date are wearing heavy winter coats that same evening. Similar shifts occur throughout the entire film. All of these choices are intentional and are instrumental in keeping the audience in suspense because it is impossible to situate oneself in time. Even when there is nothing scary happening on screen, the uncanny setting means there are few places that the viewers can get their bearings either visually or audibly.

Finally, outside the context of individual scenes, there is the juxtaposition of "Detroit"

[43] Buhler and Neumeyer, *Hearing the Movies*, 125.

with the rest of the soundtrack. Noise, whether ambient or aggressive, is the norm in *It Follows*. "Jay," "Detroit," "Title," "Linger," and to some degree, "Lakeward" and "Pool," are the only melodic tracks in a soundtrack full of bleak dissonance and subtle drones. As described earlier, the familiar, here a clear melody and some semblance of tonality emerging from the soundscape, appearing in an unexpected place invokes the uncanny. The uncanny here is not inherently negative, just unsettling. The film establishes an implicit contract wherein nothing frightening can happen when a melody appears. Throughout the film, music is never used to misdirect, so "horror" music remains in frightening scenes, while melodic music appears in transitions. Vreeland expressed this intention in his in-depth blog post on *It Follows*, writing, "The music serves as a hair-raiser in scarier moments…We often use melodic cues to underline character and plot development, as well as segues between larger sections of the film."[44] In the context of a horror film that thrives on maintaining suspense as long as possible, however, a calm moment will simply build to the next big scare, creating anticipatory fear or dread for the viewer.[45]

While conjuring the uncanny is its primary role, "Detroit" is also used as a character device. Throughout the film, Jay's perception of the world around her changes rapidly. The curse can follow from any distance, so Jay cannot stay in one place for long. Her once comfortable suburban life becomes a nightmare, the anticipation of her impending doom looming over her. "Detroit" reflects Jay's initial naiveté about the world around her. Through her attempts to avoid her fate, she comes to realize that her home is not the haven she believed it was. The more lighthearted scalar passages in "Detroit" correspond to Jay's old worldview, while the bass represents the shift in her perception. This type of change in perspective is an ongoing theme in

[44] Vreeland, "In Depth: It Follows."

[45] Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, 146.

It Follows, expressed by Yara at the end of the film:

> When I was a little girl my parents told me I wasn't allowed to go south of 8 Mile. I didn't even understand what that meant. It wasn't until I got a little older that I realized that was where the city started and the suburbs ended.

Nearly every character in *It Follows* goes through a radical shift in perspective during the events of the movie. "Detroit" successfully makes this shift audible to the viewer. The characters who live to see the end of the film know that they may never be guaranteed safety again, and the optimistic arpeggios of "Detroit" have long since faded.

"Jay"

"Jay," the protagonist's theme, appears twice during the film's exposition. The first coincides with Jay's first appearance. She is floating serenely in an above ground pool as young boys from the neighborhood spy on her through the chain-link fence. The scene is mostly without dialogue, only interrupted by Jay telling the boys that she can see them. The second accompanies Jay as she takes a walk with her sister. Along the way, she greets Greg, her handsome neighbor, who shows interest in Jay.

Both scenes convey a similar message about Jay: that she is desirable and likable. Her desirability is implied through the male gaze, first through the spying boys, then through Greg's lingering stare after their brief interaction. And just before seeing Greg, Jay admits to her sister that she and Hugh have not had sex, but that she knows he wants to. Throughout the film, Jay is consistently the object of desire for the young men in her social circle. In a story that is centered around a curse passed through sexual intercourse, the audience must perceive Jay as physically attractive. Her dilemma is not whether she *can* pass her curse on to someone else, but if she *should.* Multiple men in her life offer to take that burden from her willingly: a potentially altruistic act that affords them the chance to sleep with her.

Jay's likability is conveyed primarily through her interactions with her sister. First, Jay is invited to watch a movie with Kelly and her friends. Jay declines, explaining that she has a date with Hugh later. Her sister expresses her approval. Later, Kelly thanks Jay for walking with her and helping her hide her smoking habit from their mother. There is genuine care in the sisters' relationship, displayed both times the "Jay" theme appears. Unlike Jay's attractiveness, Jay's kindness is presented for the viewer rather than for the other characters. Because there is so little dialogue in the film, these scenes ensure that the audience develops sympathy for Jay. If we did not like her as a person, the horror in the film would most likely be less effective. To feel genuinely afraid for her safety, the audience must believe that Jay is worth saving. Richard Vreeland intended for the music to play a role in establishing these perceptions for the audience by adding emotional weight.[46] As he explains in his in-depth blog post on *It Follows,* "The music tries to build empathy for the characters. They seemed quite real to me already, but I tried to help how I could."[47]

"Jay" is more melodic than other tracks, albeit not strictly tonal. It features the same synthesizer but has none of the other horror elements found in the rest of the score. Even when compared to the other melodic cues, "Jay" provides the closest thing to tonality in the film, and gives the listener a sense of familiarity that positions Jay as the innocent protagonist with whom we can sympathize.[48] Unlike "Detroit," which implies something darker under the surface, "Jay" is more serene. The lower bass notes do not carry the same sense of danger that they do in "Detroit."

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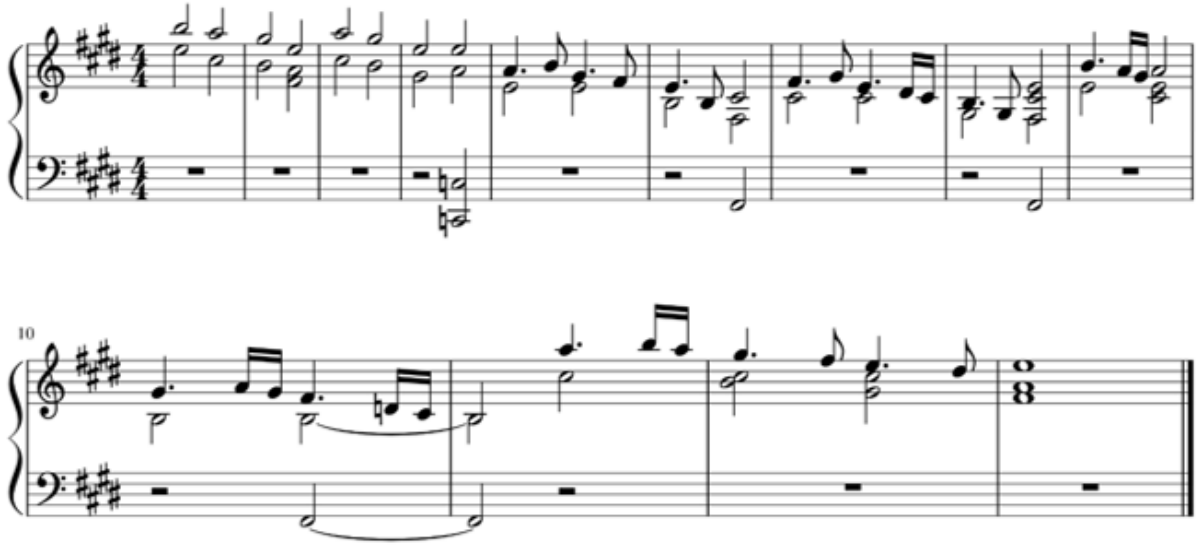
[46] Budgor, "From Fez to It Follows: A Conversation with Disasterpeace."

[47] Vreeland, "In Depth: It Follows."

[48] Stan Link, "The Monster and the Music Box: Children and the Soundtrack of Horror," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear,* ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 38-54.

Musical Example 2: "Jay"



With simple harmonies, a straight forward melody, and a clear timbre, “Jay” is one of the least dense tracks in *It Follows*. This thinner, more accessible sound plays into the audience’s perception of Jay. Stan Link has shown that, “Simple music *plays* innocence, deepening our experience of it. The piece can be heard as a performance, both musical and symbolic, of youthful vulnerability.”[49] In the chapter, Link refers to a much more literal example: the halting sound of a child playing simple exercises on a piano. While “Jay” does not have the same direct connection to childhood, it still performs innocence. This track represents Jay at the beginning of the film and, as Link describes, deepens our experience and understanding of Jay’s innocence.

This innocence is more pronounced when “Jay” is compared to the only other track named for a character, “Greg.” The pizzicato theme appears only twice in the film, first in a track called “Inquiry” when Greg and Jay seek information on Hugh from a high school, and again after Jay has sex with Greg in the hospital. The following scenes make clear that, despite sleeping with her to take the curse, Greg never believed that anything was following Jay. His

[49] Link, “The Monster and the Music Box,” 40.

interest in helping was no more than an attempt to reignite their high school fling. When the entity finally arrives at Greg's home, it appears as his mother and murders him in front of a horrified Jay. The theme that accompanies the murder does not evoke the same sympathy for Greg that "Jay" does for our protagonist, nor should it. "Greg" more closely resembles the rest of the soundtrack, playing up the suspense and horror leading up to and during the murder rather than attempting to conjure emotion about Greg's death. In fact, in the immediate aftermath, the camera focuses only on Jay as she drives away, cutting between her blank-faced resolve to escape and her extreme fear and sadness. Greg's pizzicato lacks the clear timbre and near tonality heard in "Jay," implicitly telling the audience that they need not empathize with Greg. Other than coming up in a short conversation between Jay and Paul, Greg receives no further mention after his death.

Conclusion

Vreeland's music is tasked with making scary moments scarier: a task that is difficult in a film with an invisible or visually unidentifiable antagonist. To create effective horror, the audience must be fully immersed in the setting and sympathetic to the protagonist. Vreeland achieves this immersion through the use of melodic themes that establish the characters, as well as their thoughts and feelings about their world. Although these themes are devoid of the horror tropes discussed in the previous chapter, they still contribute to a horror affect by creating an uncanny environment, as in "Detroit," and by endearing us to the protagonist, as in "Jay."

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Situated within a larger history, *It Follows* is a notable film. Over time, horror has generally moved away from symphonic scoring and relied more heavily on electronic and pop scores. While thematic scoring is still prominent in other genres, those themes typically focus on direct signification and do not develop. Vreeland's lack of prior experience with horror scoring resulted in a score for *It Follows* that stands out for its unique use of both old and modern techniques. The common horror scoring elements, including ostinato and drone, and the entirely electronic score are representative of modern horror, while the abstract use of leitmotif is more closely tied to classical film scoring and operatic aesthetics. This combination of new and old creates an ambiguity that blurs the binary between diegetic and nondiegetic sound and evokes the uncanny first established by the anachronism-laden setting.

This ambiguity is heard in both the melodic and non-melodic parts of the soundtrack. The two primary melodic themes, "Detroit" and "Jay," create and evoke the uncanny throughout the film by juxtaposing nearly tonal melodies with ominous droning basslines. The uncertainty and instability conveyed in these themes increase the viewer's anxiety while reflecting the internal struggles of the protagonist. By both representing and embodying the antagonist, "Heels," a non-melodic theme, places the audience in the gap between diegetic and nondiegetic sound, depriving them of their ability to ground themselves in the scene. In scenes of imminent danger, the drone appears and creates cinematic dread, growing louder until it gives way to cinematic horror, punctuated by a musical sting or shocking image.

It Follows features very little dialogue and has a visually indistinguishable, and often invisible antagonist, so the soundtrack must convey significant meaning to the audience.

Vreeland's score uses a patchwork of horror scoring techniques from throughout the history of film, resulting in a soundtrack that effectively replaces the visual flair found in other films.

APPENDIX

TIMESTAMPS FOR MUSIC CUES IN *IT FOLLOWS*

Track	Timecode
Heels	1:07
Jay	4:42
	13:16
Anyone	20:43
Old Maid	28:30
Company	36:30
Detroit	32:13
	44:45
Detritus	45:55
Playpen	48:10
Inquiry	49:30
Lakeward	55:10
Doppel	59:03
Relay	1:04:50
Greg	1:06:33
Snare	1:15:45
Pool	1:22:30
Father	1:26:00
Linger	1:33:15

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